

Organizations in Traumatized Societies: The Israeli Case

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Abstract

Israel is a traumatized and traumatizing society. Its people and its culture are virtually saturated with memories of the Holocaust and other traumatic events, which go back for centuries and have unconsciously affected the mentality and actions of Jewish as well as non-Jewish citizens. Current fears of annihilation are linked with the fears experienced by previous generations. Within the context of organizations, the consequences of such fears are manifested in patterns of incohesion. Thus, their organizations oscillate between aggregation and massification, and develop social and cultural forms of encapsulation that can be understood in terms of the fourth basic assumption in the unconscious life of social systems.

Key words: social trauma; group analysis; social defence mechanism; social unconscious; traumatized organizations.

ASPECTS OF TRAUMA IN THE HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE AS SEEN IN ISRAELI SOCIETY

The state of Israel was born as a national home for the Jewish people, and has faced ongoing struggles since its establishment. Centuries of disasters and persecution in the Diaspora have left their traces in the collective memory of the Jewish people. These processes may be understood in terms of their 'social unconscious' (Hopper, 2003a, 2007; Weinberg, 2007). Weinberg (2007) defines the social unconscious as the co-constructed, shared unconscious of members of a certain social system such as community, society, nation, or culture. It includes shared anxieties, fantasies, defences, myths, and memories. Its building bricks are made of chosen traumas and chosen glories (Volkan, 1999).

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Associations with primordial social trauma events are ubiquitous in Israel. Every act of terror revives a primary threat to Jewish survival, as well as unconscious memories of the destruction of the Second Temple, the exile from Spain in 1492, the Holocaust, and many other disastrous events. The Holocaust is especially important in this context, as it played a central role in moulding the new identity of a strong people who protect themselves from a hostile outside world and lean heavily on their military power. To understand this process, it is useful to think in terms of the concept 'chosen trauma' (Volkan, 1999), which refers to the shared mental representation of a massive trauma experienced by the ancestors of the group members. Chosen trauma describes the collective memory of a disaster, the echoes of which become a paradigm that keeps the existential threat in the national memory in order to ward off potential complacency. Israel's most outstanding chosen trauma is the Holocaust. In fact, it may even be overused in public discourse.

The image of the weak and victimized Jew who is helpless against oppression was replaced by the metaphor of the Israeli *Sabra*, a heroic character who stands against all pressures (Gretz, 1995; Almog, 1997). This image has been used to create a unified social identity for the immigrants to Israel as well as an idealized fantasy for Jewish communities dispersed throughout the world. Originally, the image of the *Sabra* included enlightened and humanistic social norms, along with strong and heroic features. However, more than three decades of ruling another people (the Palestinians) have shattered this image. The deterioration of moral values in Israeli society has been gradual, and is difficult to observe. By and large, Israeli policy has been justified by the need for security in light of the situation of ongoing war and terror.

In the context of this collective memory of social trauma, and the memory of the Holocaust in particular, it is important to note the simultaneous existence of two overpowering social psychological images that exist in opposition to one another and that are available for splitting, disavowal, and projection into the ubiquitous 'other': the weak, victimized Jew on the one hand, and the heroic, proud *Sabra* on the other.

A vignette from a group in Israel clarifies the above description:

In a group session, the participants brought up memories and associations from their parental homes, and examined how those memories influenced their development. One of the group members, a woman, became very emotional. She wanted to tell her story, but her throat was clogged, and she almost choked as tears filled her eyes. The group was patient and waited until her emotional storm passed. When she was able to talk, she recalled an encounter with her father a few years before, when he had come to visit

her new house. She met him on the main road, and they walked through a peaceful Arab village in order to reach the Jewish village where she lived (in the Galilee). Her father became restless, and suggested that they bypass the Arab village. Suddenly, she felt a wave of rage towards him and shouted, 'Why do you have to project your fears from the Diaspora on to me? I don't want to be influenced by this grovelling attitude of yours.'

The encounter between the father, a Holocaust survivor who was haunted by traumatic memories and anxieties, and his daughter, a *Sabra* who tried to split off those 'weak' points and project them on to her father, reveals the ubiquitous mechanisms of disavowal, splitting, and projection. Those images have been shattered in recent years, as a result of the deterioration of moral values and the prolonged occupation. In that context, the 'chosen trauma' of the Holocaust has weakened as a collective defence, and the image of the *Sabra* has been tarnished.

The second Intifada, which broke out in October 2000, accelerated this process, as the violent political conflict has escalated dramatically, and existential anxieties, threats, and paranoia have dominated the public scene. Concerns about security have taken priority over questions of human rights. The more Israelis try to defend themselves against threats of terror, the more insensitive to injustice they become. The price of this growing insensitivity to injustice and aggression has also manifested itself within Israeli society. Denial of, and disregard for, injustice to neighbours have also increased callousness towards caring for the poor and the weak in one's own home. Deep rifts and increased diversity between population groups in Israeli society have generated instability, insecurity, and increased inequality. There is a wide gap between rich and poor, as well as discrimination against minorities, new immigrants, and foreign workers (Laufer and Harel, 2003; Mor-Barak, Nuttman-Shwartz and Findler, 2005). The same trend is evident in responses to the Qassam war at the south-western border of Israel: whereas some areas of Israel, especially those near the Gaza Strip, have been exposed to daily terror attacks over the past seven years, the rest of the country has continued living as if nothing has happened, with no protests, no demonstrations, and only minor expressions of identification (Nuttman-Shwartz, 2007). Thus, most residents of Israel have dissociated themselves from the ongoing threat and have failed to acknowledge the implications of living in such a dangerous place. During the Second Lebanon War in July 2006, residents of the northern region of Israel experienced similar feelings when they were bombarded with Katyusha rockets. The Second Lebanon War further shattered the image of the strong, invincible

Sabra – a process that began after the Yom Kippur War in 1973 – as Israelis felt, for the first time since the establishment of the state, that they had not won, and that they were helpless in the struggle against well-organized guerilla fighters, regardless of the objective facts. Self-doubts regarding the country's resilience crept into the public discourse, and led to the establishment of a committee of inquiry, which was appointed to investigate who was responsible for the poor outcome of the war.

In sum, the experience of Jewish Israelis is shaped by collective memories of traumatization that remain in the social unconscious of Israeli society. Is it possible that the victims became aggressors? Can we talk about a deep unconscious process of identification with the aggressor? These possibilities are difficult for Israelis to absorb, because they are used to perceiving themselves as compassionate victims.

ISRAEL AS A TRAUMATIZED SOCIETY

In the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (DSM-IV)*, a traumatic event is defined as one involving 'actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity' (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 424). Thus, the threats can be to life and to physical integrity, or they can involve injury, loss of close and beloved people, and loss of one's self-image and values. The traumatic event disrupts normal life, and upsets the relationship between the traumatized people and their surrounding environment. As a result, fear of the unknown and a sense of helplessness ensue (Weinberg, Nuttman-Shwartz, & Gilmore, 2005).

Israel is considered a traumatized society due to historical and current events. Daily life in Israel is always under the shadow of possible war, terror attacks, and other situations that are either life threatening or endanger the well-being of Israeli citizens. 'Normal life' in Israel includes continuous stress, and persistent threats to physical and psychological integrity. The traumatic past, especially the horror of the Holocaust and centuries of persecution, is ever present in the consciousness of Israelis, and is also deeply embedded in their social unconscious. Moreover, as many group analysts have argued (Scheidlinger, 1968; Volkan, 2002; Hopper, 2003b; Weinberg, 2006; Weinberg and Nuttman-Shwartz, 2006), trauma leads to regression, not only in individuals, but also in social systems. Thus, we can expect signs of regression in Israeli society (Hopper, 2003a; 2003b).

Volkan (2002) describes the process of 'societal (large group) regression', which occurs after a society has faced a massive trauma, and which aims to maintain or restore the shared social identity among

members of the society. Societal regression occurs when the majority of people belonging to that society share anxieties, behaviours, and thoughts that typify regression. He describes the signs of social regression as follows: group members lose their individuality, they rally blindly around the leader, they become divided into 'good' and 'bad' segments within the society, and they create a sharp division between 'us' and 'them' *vis-à-vis* 'enemy' groups.

In Israel, more than half of the signs of social regression enumerated by Volkan can be observed with a high degree of intensity, as reflected in intolerance of internal differences. Left-wing Israelis consider the Jewish settlers who inhabit territories in the West Bank enemies of peace, whereas people on the right wing call the left-wingers criminals and friends of terrorists. The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin is an extreme example of where this polarization can lead (Schneider, 2002). It is also worth noting that the public mood in Israel changes dramatically from depression and feelings of helplessness after terror attacks, to euphoria and manic feelings after victories or successful military actions (Hadari, 2002). This phenomenon fits well with Volkan's description of how regressed societies use extensive introjective and projective mechanisms and show extreme mood swings. At the same time, this oscillation can be seen as a coping mechanism that enables Israelis to continue living in the face of ongoing existential threats.

Recent research has shown that, in the shadow of massive and continuous national and individual traumas, Israelis have largely adapted to the situation without substantial mental health consequences, and they have sought to cope with terrorism and its ongoing threats in various ways (Bleich, Gelkopf and Solomon, 2003; Yanay, David and Shayit, 2004; Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel, in press). Moreover, the sense of belonging to the community and to the country has increased, and social motives have served as protective shield for people living under ongoing threat (Dekel and Nuttman-Shwartz, n.d., accepted).

Many studies conducted in recent years have examined the long-term impact of exposure to terror on Israeli society. This exposure has also affected citizens who were not directly injured or were not even personally acquainted with victims of terror. The ongoing stress of terrorist attacks has undermined the citizens' sense of security and confidence in the state, which is supposed to protect them and ensure their safety (Bleich, Gelkopf, Melamed and Solomon, 2006; Gelkopf, Solomon, Berger and Bleich, 2008; Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel, under review). These studies have also shown that Israeli society is fairly resistant to stress and terror. Even though symptoms of anxiety, tension, and stress are evident, they appear in low intensity and with relatively few symptoms that typify PTSD.

Although the data suggest that most of the Israeli population does not have PTSD, the prevailing mood of society still swings like a pendulum from hyper-vigilance to numbing of responsiveness, in a way typical of PTSD (*DSM-IV*, 1994). Herman (1992) described the dialectic of those contrasting mental states as the most typical feature of post trauma stress, where intrusive symptoms alternate with emotional anaesthesia. This dialectic is clearly seen in reactions to terror threats and attacks. On the one hand, Israeli citizens can over-react to the threat of suicide bombings, leaving mothers anxious whenever their children go out, or causing people to avoid shopping centres and restaurants. On the other hand, the opposite reaction prevails in some cases, as Israelis continue their daily life and seem indifferent to the horrifying scenes of terrorism on television.

ORGANIZATIONS IN TRAUMATIZED SOCIETIES

By definition, organizations have structure, hierarchy, and leadership, as well as definite roles, rules, clear boundaries, and communication procedures. An organization is not a large group, but it is a particular kind of social formation whose members identify with its goals, maintain its boundaries, and respect its norms (McDougal, 1920). Organizations rely on their histories and tradition, and emphasize continuity. In abstract terms, the organization is the opposite of a chaotic crowd with respect to many aspects of social and cultural processes.

However, regression can occur under certain conditions, for example, when traumatic experiences have occurred within the organization and its environment. As Hopper (2003b) argues, the consequences of such traumatic experiences include blurred boundaries, a desire for fusion, the use of archaic defence mechanisms such as projection, splitting, and projective identification, which lead to the emergence of early object relations. Triest (2003) claimed that, in a comparison of large groups and organizations, the organization traps the group spirit like a genie in a bottle: 'The large group will always threaten the setting imposed upon it by the organization, although it is naturally dependent upon the setting for its existence' (p. 167). 'There is a constant dialectic tension between the organization, which offers "order", and the large group, which is a boiling caldron of chaos' (p. 173).

As Hopper (2003b) argued, knowledge of group processes cannot be applied in a simple way to understanding of societal and organizational processes. Even though group analysts tend to conflate all social formations, and although the word 'group' is used to denote all social formations as opposed to 'individuals', societies differ from the organizations within them, and groups differ from them both. Traumatized

societies tend to regress, as do traumatized organizations and groups within them. Thus, just as societies can become more like organizations, organizations can become more like groups, and groups can become more like individuals. In that context, the concepts, theories, and data that are usually applied to one of those social formations become applicable to all of them. For example, analysis of Bion's (1961) basic assumptions (see next section) and the personifications of those assumptions, which are usually applicable only to groups and group members, can be applied in attempts to understand organizations within traumatized societies, because it is likely that those organizations themselves have regressed, as have many of the people within them.

Bion (1961) described the strong regressive unconscious powers activated in a group, and divided them into three basic assumptions (b/a): dependency b/a, fight/flight b/a, and pairing b/a. Hopper (2003b) expanded those three basic assumptions, and argued that a regressed traumatized society manifests behaviours stemming from a fourth basic assumption, as expressed in bi-polar forms of incohesion. When this assumption (I:A/M b/a) is activated, groups and group-like social systems oscillate between aggregation and massification. In the aggregation polarity, people feel alienated from one another, and indifference, hostility, and withdrawal from relationships prevail. In the extreme form of the aggregation polarity, each sub-group opposes another sub-group. By contrast, in the massification polarity, there is a sense of merging, a denial of differences, and an illusion of togetherness and sameness. Undoubtedly, Israel swings between periods of heated conflicts between sub-groups (e.g., right wing *vs* left wing ideologies, Ashkenazi *vs* Sephardi Jews, and religious *vs* secular Jews) on the one hand, as evidenced lately, and periods of unquestioned consensus and an illusion of united solidarity on the other, as evidenced in wartime or when terror attacks occur.

If we accept that Israel is a traumatized society according to the above analysis, and consider that Israeli citizens share a common traumatized history, we can expect organizations in Israel to react to traumatic events involving loss, damage, and massive disruption by emphasizing the fear of annihilation and by expressing that fear within the development of I:A/M b/a. At least two overarching processes are involved: the experience of the population at large, and the experience of members of organizations. Specifically, the first process brings together certain aspects of the historical and the contemporary contexts of Israeli and Jewish societies, and revives memories, anxieties, and defences that are harboured in their social unconscious; and the second process is one of the enactments of a basic assumption that

reflects the unconscious life of the organization. Group analysts believe that those two processes are always interrelated.

EMPIRICAL VIGNETTES OF ORGANIZATIONS IN ISRAEL

First vignette: organizational responses to accidents and deaths

An industrial factory situated in the central region of Israel employs 250 workers and ten managers. In July 1997, an accident occurred, killing two employees, one of whom was a manager. About half a year later, another work accident occurred, killing another worker.

The first accident happened when hydrogen gas exploded in the production device. Evidently, the second accident was also caused by the ignition and explosion of hydrogen. After the first accident, there was a steep rise in the anxiety level of all of the workers and managers in the organization. Following the accident, the workers formed a group that was seemingly cohesive, in which they discussed the unfortunate event repeatedly and reconstructed their whereabouts at the time of the accident. Strict safety norms and regulations as well as higher levels of control were enforced and maintained by the workers and managers. None the less, the managers avoided taking other responsibilities related to the work at the factory, and preferred to involve their superiors in virtually all aspects of decision making, no matter how mundane the issues were. They delayed the completion of tasks, and tensions developed between managers and workers at all levels of the organizational hierarchy. Essentially, the groups became pseudo-cohesive rather than genuinely cohesive, and they were characterized by massification. Groups characterized by massification are not manageable, because role differentiation and specialization cannot be maintained.

With regard to the second event, which occurred five months later, the workers and managers did not respond in the same way. In this case, the executive management threatened to close the factory if another fatal accident occurred. Everyone felt a sense of existential and financial danger, and an atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and paranoia prevailed. No one wanted to replace the dead worker's position, and an outside contractor was brought in to finish the job. In the search for a scapegoat, the workers directed their anger at the manager of the factory, who had planned the system fifteen years earlier and was held responsible for causing the accidents. Eventually, the manager had a heart attack and resigned.

The factory invested a lot of money in buying new safety equipment. However, no memorial events were held following the death

associated with the second accident, whereas many memorial activities were held in connection with the deaths caused by the first accident. Although the increased anxiety levels following the second accident led to many changes in the management, the changes focused on formulating written regulations and instructions, and did not relate to any dimension of interpersonal relations at the factory. These patterns indicate a continuing oscillation between aggregation and massification. On the one hand, everyone looked out for himself, and there was a widespread sense of 'me-ness' (Lawrence, Bain and Gould, 1996), as evidenced in constant splitting between the management and workers, as well as within the management and among groups of workers. On the other hand, there were processes of massification, as reflected in scapegoating and in the investment of considerable intellectual and emotional energy in impersonal regulations.

This case study reveals how the traumatized organization and the traumatized society are intertwined. Fear of annihilation is ubiquitous in Israeli society, stemming not only from chosen trauma but also from the daily threat of terror (Volkan, 1999). Overreaction to dramatic events is a societal issue, which is reminiscent of the startle response that typifies PTSD, or hypersensitive responses to trauma (Herman, 1992). In addition, the preoccupation with memorial ceremonies and with perpetuating the memory of the deceased is well-known in Israel, and was clearly manifested in the organization after the first accident. Thus, the boundaries between this organization and its environment were blurred, and the parallel processes of traumatization in the organization and in Israeli society were much in evidence. In those processes, 'certain aspects of both the historical and the contemporary context of a group might be brought into it . . .' (Hopper, 2003a, p. 94). As seen in the above example, these processes represent the unconscious repetition of a social situation. In the organization, the capacity to mourn became limited after the second accident, just as the capacity to mourn in Israeli society became constricted after the massive trauma of the Holocaust. However, the processes of I:A/M b/a were also based on dynamics in the organization itself.

Israeli society developed the notion of 'men do not cry', and men do not display emotions such as fear and weakness in the attempt to cope with danger. Consistent with those norms, Israeli women have reported more psychological symptoms following terror attacks, and are more susceptible to PTSD, even though Israeli men are more exposed to those attacks (Bleich, Gelkopf, & Solomon, 2003). Often, societies deal with trauma either by splitting into sub-groups and emphasizing conflicts between sub-groups on the one hand, or by superficial, temporary unification in the face of a severe threat on the other hand.

These mechanisms manifested themselves in the vignette above within the societal organization of the factory, and they reflected what happens outside in society at large. In order to survive, people ignore the fear, minimize communication around the trauma, and continue living 'as if there is no war' both outside and inside the organization. As survival pressures minimize the capacity for elaboration of trauma in organizations, discussions about responsibility and leadership become limited. In the face of existential threats, Israelis can only fall back on the worn-out slogans 'strong army – strong people – strong leadership'.

*Second vignette: recurring trauma in the Israeli
Institute of Group Analysis*

The beginning of group analysis in Israel, which led to the establishment of the Israeli Institute of Group Analysis (IIGA) in 2001, can be traced back three decades, when Foulkes visited Israel in the late 1970s. After that visit, a team of British group analysts was invited by the well-known psychiatrist Shamai Davidson, who served as director of Shalvata, an outstanding mental hospital in Israel. The first block training course in group analysis opened in 1991, and a diploma course was initiated several years later, in 1995. However, a year after the diploma course opened, it was interrupted traumatically, causing considerable damage to the forty-four participants, who were senior mental health professionals and group therapists in Israel. Hadar and Ofer (2001), who analysed the conscious and unconscious reasons for this break, reported that massive splitting had occurred among the Israeli participants in the course, as well as among the British staff members and between the Israelis and the staff. That process led to projections, projective identifications, and finally to disintegration of the group – mechanisms that are now part of the social unconscious of the Institute of Group Analysis and have manifested themselves on many levels. The history of group analysis in Israel is full of interruptions, crises, and traumas. Although the IIGA was established for the purpose of healing past wounds and helping the people involved in the course overcome their trauma, the shadow of splitting remained in the air and dictated a cautious style of managing conflicts. For example, participants in the large group sessions tiptoed, and did not engage in authentic and committed elaboration of the previous trauma. None the less, the diploma course finished successfully in 2003, and a year before the end of that course, the IIGA opened a new diploma course for senior therapists. One of the reasons for this seemingly hasty process was the IIGA's desire to become a normal

organization, with members who had not experienced trauma. Hence, the new course evoked uneasiness and restlessness in the first session, and in the large group meetings participants expressed fears relating to potential competition and loss of privileges.

During that period, the board of the IIGA was busy formulating the bylaws of the Institute, which were brought before the general assembly for discussion and evaluation. One of the important items on the agenda was the issue of determining who would be eligible for a full diploma and title of group analyst. One of the most controversial issues was whether social workers from the second course, who had been trained and taught how to lead groups, would be able to receive the same clinical diploma as other therapists. In the end, history repeated itself, and a stormy session led to splitting, where the social workers were left feeling traumatized and rejected. The conflict involved vociferous struggles, which generated a high sense of vulnerability and fear of fragmentation. To this very day, some of the active participants in the original course do not see themselves as part of the organization. This unfortunate event can be seen as a re-enactment of the original trauma, in which the victims of the first interrupted course became the aggressors, and victimized the social workers who participated in the second course. There are many possible explanations for what took place, although no one explanation is sufficient to elaborate the original trauma. The response of the original victims could be interpreted as 'identification with the aggressor', a mechanism that is evident in Israeli society. Identification with the aggressor is one way of explaining why Jews who had been victims of the Holocaust became aggressors who are insensitive to the suffering of another people, i.e., the Palestinians. However, I:A/M b/a can also be seen in this vignette, together with parallel processes that revived memories of both the organizational and social past. Those processes can be seen as a kind of group transference of an unconsciously perceived situation from its broader social context to the present. Thus, through forms of externalization and internalization, the case of the IIGA replicates the dynamics of victimhood and aggression in Israeli society. At the same time, there are dynamics in the organization that affect the situation, which follow the basic assumption I: A/M.

The dynamics and social defences in Israeli society are similar to those in the organization described above. The State of Israel was established in the wake of the Holocaust, largely because it became self-evident that the Jewish people needed a safe haven. Many of the survivors tried to overcome their traumatic experiences by repressing their memories, avoiding any discussion about them, and ignoring the death-camp prisoner number tattooed on their wrists. Native-born

Israelis joined this conspiracy of silence, and avoided confronting those who had been there with the painful past. For years, the memories of the Holocaust and its deep impact on the survivors remained unspoken and were not worked through. In the initial period following the establishment of the Israeli State (the 1950s and 1960s), there was no public discussion about the Holocaust. The memories were still too painful, and there was an element of shame about being helpless and not resisting the massacre. Thus, the prevailing atmosphere of denial and the evasion of discussion about what really happened left the survivors feeling isolated and misunderstood. They were not able to mourn their losses, and focused on surviving without touching the painful memories. In some cases, this response resulted in nightmares, which were sometimes reflected in hidden guilt feelings, and mostly transferred to the second generation of the Holocaust survivor children. According to Volkan (1997), this is the natural platform for the emergence of a chosen trauma in the nation's memory that cannot be elaborated or worked through.

We can see how a traumatized organization like the IIGA in the second vignette, which existed in a traumatized society, was in danger of activating the same social defences harboured in the Israeli social unconscious, that would enact and repeat the same maladaptive behaviour patterns revealed in that society. In both vignettes, emphasis was placed on the question of mourning, as well as on the oscillation between mechanisms of aggregation and massification, as evidenced in uniting against an external enemy on the one hand, and mechanisms of splitting and looking for an internal enemy or scapegoat on the other. These mechanisms are typical of Israel as a traumatized society. Thus, the traumatic organizational events activated the fourth b/a I:A/M, and at the same time evoked the memories harboured in the social unconscious and defences that are part of that unconscious.

The second vignette suggests that the only way for the organization to free itself from enacting the traumatic experience is to work through the trauma.

EPILOGUE

Trauma is defined as a condition in which the relationship to an object is shattered, perhaps irreparably, and generates a profound loss of safety. The process of repairing traumatic states requires a mutual regulation with another or others (Stern, 1983). Israeli society has been traumatized for two main reasons: the first relates to the history of the Jewish people, and the second relates to the history of the State of

Israel. Both the Jewish people and the State of Israel have been saturated with traumatic events, which have restricted the ability of Israeli citizens to mourn and complete the grieving process. In traumatized societies, organizations are likely to adopt the same behaviour patterns manifested in their unsafe environment. Blurred boundaries between the organization and society in times of stress enhance the penetration of social defences and the impingement of the social unconscious in the life of the organization.

To sum up, organizations in traumatized societies are susceptible to two interrelated and parallel processes. In the first process, the members of the organization who belong to the traumatized society are influenced by its social unconscious, and reactivate chosen traumas. In the second process, the organization, which has its own history and unconscious, is exposed to enactments of a basic assumption in the unconscious life of the organization.

The two events described in the paper provide insights into how much impact living in traumatic society has on its organizations, especially when the current crisis is linked with a chosen trauma. The examples demonstrate how the organization and all of its members are influenced, whether the organization is an industrial plant or a social service provider. In light of these events, we conclude that trauma affects organizations on a level beyond social awareness, as trauma, by definition, is penetrating, impinging, and typified by excitation and detachment.

The fact that the two authors of this article are Israelis themselves arouses two important interrelated questions: (1) can we look at the social processes in our own society with enough objectivity?; (2) are we not influenced by the same basic assumptions and regressive tendencies in our writing, as members of this traumatized society? Regarding the first question, we believe that the group analytic lens allows for distancing, and facilitates relatively objective observation, especially as one of the authors has recently moved to the USA. In addition, we have both written about and analysed Israeli society and its social unconscious (Weinberg and Nuttman-Shwartz, 2006; Weinberg, 2007), in addition to co-editing a special issue of the journal *Group Analysis*, which focused on the topic of trauma groups (Weinberg & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2005). The second question is more difficult to answer, and we assume that we have been susceptible to some of the same processes that we have attempted to describe in Israeli society as well as in organizations. This regression might have led to some fragmentation or lack of focus in this paper. We hope that the combination of one author living abroad and the other living under the continuous threat of fire, as well as the reviewers' comments

and the consultation of Dr Earl Hopper, have provided the necessary distance that will enable us to conceptualize the experiences of the self.

Israel is a case in point of a traumatized society, and is a fitting laboratory for testing Hopper's fourth basic assumption. We witness trauma in everyday life in Israel, and in social arrangements that revolve around bereavement and crises, as well as in clinical work, in research, and in the life of organizations. Israeli society oscillates between numbness and aggregation on the one hand, and the intrusion and excitation of massification on the other. As long as the citizens of Israel face an existential threat, Israeli society and its organizations will continue to oscillate between these two polarities. The attempt to deal with the traumatic situation leads to a process of regression, where traumatic states are maintained and reconstructed, and society is unable to create a social narrative of growth. In times of hope for peace (following the Oslo agreements, and even during the process of relocation from Gush Katif and northern Samaria in 2005), Israelis showed a temporary ability to begin social mourning processes, in which the conditions for elaboration of national-social trauma were constructed. This process manifests itself in a readiness to talk about the price of war, and in a transition from hegemonic mourning patterns to a diverse range of more authentic mourning patterns (Doron and Lebel, 2003; Nuttman-Shwartz, Lictentriet and Rubin, 2004). These positive signs cannot be sustained without the enhancement and encouragement of social and political leaders sponsored by responsible and fully engaged citizens.

Understanding the unconscious connection between traumatized organizations and society can facilitate understanding which processes should be worked through in an organization after trauma, helping to distinguish between the organizational event and environmental events. Awareness of the possibility of blurring boundaries by both management and employees might enhance the mourning processes necessary for elaboration of the organizational trauma.

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